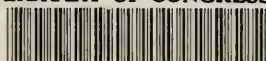


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MR. PORTER'S
HALF-CENTURY SERMON.

RYE, N. H.—1835.



HALF CENTURY

SERMON,

IN TWO PARTS.

PREACHED AT RYE, N.H.

JANUARY, 1835.

BY HUNTINGTON PORTER, A.M.

SENIOR PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN THAT TOWN.

*Occasioned by the close of Half a Century of his
Ministry there.*

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE HEARERS.

PORTSMOUTH:
PRINTED BY MILLER & BREWSTER,
1835.

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S E R M O N .

IN view of my age and infirmities, I hope, my friends, for your sympathy and candor, while I offer a few things for our mutual consideration and benefit.

I am about to address you on a very unusual occasion ;—an occasion that never before occurred in this town, and in but few instances in any of the towns around us. The occasion is the close of half a century since I was ordained, and have stately and occasionally labored in the work of the ministry in this place. O, how rapidly ; how insensibly ; and, alas ! how unprofitably have fifty years rolled away ! And yet how interesting have been many of the scenes, and solemn the dispensations of Providence, through which your aged pastor and the people of his charge have been called to pass ! Notwithstanding these various events, some of which have been afflictive, perilous and mortal, the speaker has been sustained by the arm of divine power and mercy, and is able to stand before you this day a witness of the sparing goodness of God.

And now, my friends, what shall I say unto you ? With what words and feelings shall I come to you ? What inspired passage shall be selected on which to address you ? Shall I come to you, as St. Paul expresses it, “ with a rod ? or in love, and in the spirit of meekness ? ” If I should come to you with a rod, would there not be found some occasion for its use ? some occasion for correction and reproof ? Would there not be found some neglects of duty, and indulgences of sin, which deserve censure and chastisement ? But if I should come to you in love, and in the spirit of meekness, it would, indeed, be more congenial to my own feelings, and, perhaps, more pleasing and acceptable to you. I have, however, selected a passage of Scripture, which may be considered more personal and humbling as it respects the speaker ; and a consideration of which, may not be unprofitable to his hearers. The passage was expressed by David the royal Psalmist, when addressing himself to the great Jehovah. It is recorded in

PSALMS, XXXIX. 5.

"MINE AGE IS AS NOTHING BEFORE THEE."

This passage, I say, is humbling to the speaker ; and is so, indeed, to all present. Every one of us, the oldest as well as the youngest, has reason to say in the presence of the great Eternal, " Mine age is as nothing before thee." And yet this age of man, this short life, is exceedingly interesting as a season of probation, and as connected with a future endless state of existence. It is full of concerns, full of disappointments, trials and troubles ; though, through divine unmerited goodness, intermingled with many privileges and blessings. Of these things we are frequently reminded in the word of God, and in the dispensations of Providence. Though these things make so little impression upon our minds, and have so little influence on our lives and conversation, they are not the less real on that account, nor the less solemn and deserving serious consideration. Shortly, and how soon or suddenly we know not, we must put off these earthly houses of our tabernacle, and follow our numerous friends and acquaintances, yea, the countless myriads of the human family that have gone before us, down to the silent grave, and into a solemn eternity. The sentence of death, we know, has gone out against all mankind ; and there is no discharge in that war. O, with what humility should we contemplate the brevity of human life ! Behold, God has made our days as a hand-breadth, and our age is as nothing before him.

Too apt are we, especially when young, to extend our views forward, and calculate upon many days and years to come. There is indeed, a great difference, apparently, between life or an age in prospect, and the same viewed in retrospect. To look forward three score years and ten, or four score years, seems a great length of time ; and, to those who are in the morning of life, as though it would scarcely ever come to an end. But, to those who have arrived to that period, life, in review, appears as a dream, or like a vapor that quickly passes away. The Patriarch Jacob, though he lived more than a century, was led at the close of life to say, "*Few* and evil have the days of the years of my life been." And the Psalmist says with respect to human life, if by reason of strength it be lengthened to four score years, it is *soon* cut off, and we fly away. Accordingly, these days and years are represented in Scripture to be very short, like a tale that is told ; and are said to be swifter than a weaver's shuttle ; to pass away as the swift ships, and as the eagle that hasteth to her prey. Although human life may appear thus short, even when prolonged to three score years and

ten, yet during that time, how numerous and important are the changes that take place. If we confine our views to the last half century, O how great and wonderful are many of the changes that have occurred, not only in the world at large, or in our own country, but even in a single town, family, or individual.

To consider the case of a *single person*; how many interesting vicissitudes are experienced through the several stages of existence; from infancy or childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, and from manhood during the remainder of life. These changes, which are various, and some of them exceedingly interesting, may have respect to health, strength, habitation, business, inward feelings, outward circumstances, connexions in life, and numberless events of Providence both merciful and afflictive. All which are closed up at last by the great and solemn change which takes place in death.

Further, with respect to a *family*. The vicissitudes are usually still more diversified and interesting in proportion to its numbers. Look into almost any family around you; trace its history for fifty years, if it has existed so long, and how vastly changed! Often so changed, that it scarcely appears to be the same family. Indeed, it is not the same. Some one, or more, or perhaps, all its members are gone, and others risen up in their stead; another generation;—a new family! At first thought we are hardly sensible of the change; but, on a little reflection we see, we know it to be so. One after another having passed off the stage, we at length, and it may be in a few years, may say with respect to the heads of the family, the fathers and mothers, Where are they? And, with respect to the brothers and sisters, or other members of the family, Have they not either been scattered abroad, or smitten by the stroke of death?

Furthermore, with respect to a *town*; what interesting and solemn changes occur in the course of half a century! Even in a shorter period than this, one generation, averaging it at twenty five or thirty years, according to usual computation, passes away and another cometh upon the stage. O how little do we realise this change! How solemn the thought, that the present generation, that we ourselves, our families, and all around us, yea, and the whole world of mankind, will soon be numbered with the dead, and such a vast multitude of immortal souls, summoned into an invisible, untried state, and their whole attention absorbed in the solemn scenes of eternity!

If moreover, we view the state of a *country*; for instance, our own country, what great events and interesting changes frequently transpire! particularly, with regard to political, civil, religious, and literary con-

cerns. What a vast change, or increase of population ! From about three millions, fifty years ago, these United States have risen, by multiplying, emigration and additional territory, to a great nation of more than thirteen millions of inhabitants ! More than two-thirds of the present States, have been added to the Union, during the last half century. And a number of them were unsettled by civilized inhabitants, till after the commencement of that period, which are now increased to large and respectable states. How has the whole face of the country changed ! in the cultivation of the earth, in the many improvements that have been made, in the wonderful works that have been effected by the hand of industry and ingenuity. What new and important inventions have been discovered to facilitate the business of life ; to the greater ease and expedition of travelling, and the transportation of goods from one city and village to another ; also, by means of straightening or shortening roads, constructing railways, canals, and steamboats ; likewise, by manufactories, and machineries of various kinds, together with many other conveniences, to facilitate the business of the mechanick, the husbandman, the mariner, and to ease the burden of the laboring class of the community generally.—View, also, a wide spread country, filled or filling rapidly with civilized inhabitants, where not long since dwelt only savage beasts, or more savage men. See large and increasing cities, pleasant and flourishing villages, with their stately edifices, fine accommodations, and sacred temples erected to the worship of God, which present themselves to view along the extensive coast, from one end of the continent to the other. And in the interior parts of our country, behold innumerable and beautiful flourishing towns, rising in prospect to the eye of the astonished citizen or stranger, as he travels along on business, or for his health, or to visit his friends, or to improve his mind in the acquisition of useful knowledge, which may be derived from a survey of the wonderful works of nature, and the pleasing productions of human skill.

I mention these things not merely for gratification or embellishment of discourse ; but, that our minds may be more deeply impressed with a sense of the wisdom and goodness of God, and the smiles of heaven upon the industry of our country ; and that we might realise more sensibly the obligations we are under of love and gratitude to our heavenly Benefactor, who according to the counsel of his own will, speaks concerning a nation or kingdom, to plant and to build up, or to pull down and destroy ; and whose hand is to be noticed and adored in all these things.

If we in the next place take a survey of the *globe* we inhabit ; if we

look around upon the *nations* of the earth, and contemplate the events, the changes, that have taken place within the last half century, O how solemn, how interesting, have many of them been ! There have been wars and rumors of wars, civil commotions and national conflicts, and the most awful carnage ; not only man rising against his fellow man in single combat, but nation against nation, devising new and the most effectual measures to kill and destroy one another. And, alas ! how many individuals have been led to destroy themselves ! How often have our ears been accosted with the unwelcome tidings of duels, riots, robberies, massacres, and garments rolled in blood ! And these things done even among those, who are called civilized nations,—christian people ! Or, if we turn our attention to heathen lands ; what cruel and barbarous deeds are perpetrated there ! parents sacrificing their children, or, children murdering their aged and helpless parents, yea, wives in their superstitious frenzy, immolating themselves upon the funeral pile of their expiring companions ! Behold, likewise, what desolations have been made in the earth, by the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noon day ; by earthquakes in divers places ; by tornadoes, volcanoes, inundations and disasters by sea and land ; laying waste not only valuable property, but also the more precious lives of men.

These calamities, to which mankind are liable, often take place in this our sinful world ; and are ever to be viewed as the sad effects of human apostacy and guilt. That these judgments are not more frequent and distressing than they are, is owing to the long suffering mercy of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. By virtue of his mediation, sacrifice and intercession, the hand of justice is in a measure stayed, a respite granted, mercy offered, and many sinful beings saved from ruin. In consequence of what Christ has done, kind and gracious measures are taken with the children of men ; ambassadors and preachers of righteousness are raised up, and sent forth, to beseech sinners to turn from their evil ways and become reconciled to God ; to bow to the sceptre of the grace and government of the Redeemer, that they may not die, but live forever.

We may further notice the great change that has taken place, during the last half century, with regard to a diversity of religious opinions.—Different religious sentiments have, indeed, been embraced and held, in all ages ; though at some periods with much less tenacity than at others. In the days of our Pilgrim fathers, the first emigrants to New-England, much harmony in doctrine and worship, it has been said, was enjoyed among them. Soon, however, there began to be some small

diversity of sentiment in religious matters ; but not to such a degree, but that they could very generally and cordially meet and worship together ; and brotherly love continued for a considerable length of time, to bless them. It might then be truly said, Behold how these christians love one another ! How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity ! But since that time, and particularly within forty or fifty years, how great the change ! How great has been the departure in many instances, from the inspired apostolic injunctions, which plainly require of christians, that, if there be any comfort of love, any fellowship of the spirit, they be like minded, have the same love, be of one accord, of one mind ; and, because there is one body, and one spirit, even as they are called in one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, they should therefore keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and love as brethren.— But now when we travel in our country, in almost any direction, we find our towns, in general, divided and subdivided into religious parties, and in some places, great strife and contention about church or secular concerns ; and consequent alienation of affection one from another, contrary to the nature of our holy religion, and the peaceable laws of the Redeemer's kingdom. Whatever may be the cause of these things, whether ignorance, prejudice, or any sinister ends, the effects are very unhappy with regard to many of our country towns. But we console ourselves with the prospect, and even assurance, according to divine prophecies and promises, of a much more happy state of things here on earth, under the reign of the Prince of peace and love.

Notwithstanding the many evils to which we have now referred, we should not forget that goodness of God, which so often and so generally triumphs over the unworthiness and ill deserts of men. The all wise ruler of the universe, we know, makes his sun to rise on the evil and good, and sends down a variety of blessings both upon the just and unjust. He crowns the years, in general, with his loving kindness ; giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling the hearts of his rational offspring with food and gladness. O, how astonishing it is, that his great goodness has no better effect upon the hearts and lives of the children of men : leading no more of them to unfeigned repentance of sin, and to sincere love, gratitude and obedience to their kind and gracious Benefactor ! It may not be improper now to notice the many *benevolent associations*, that have recently been formed for the express purpose of promoting the temporal and spiritual benefit of men. Half a century ago, little or nothing was heard of such benevolent associations and christian efforts, as have since been witnessed. The great

object of these societies and christian enterprises, is, to ameliorate the condition of man, now rendered miserable in many respects by reason of sin ; and, to reform and save a world lying in wickedness.

Contemplate, particularly, *Bible associations* ; whose noble object is, to send the word of life and salvation, to the needy and destitute parts of our own country, and also to those foreign lands, where inhabitants are perishing for lack of the saving knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal. We rejoice to hear and know, what these societies have done, and are still doing. They have had the sacred volume translated into more than two hundred different languages, and sent it to those, who were going on blindfold, as it were, in the ways of sin, delusion and death. Multitudes have already, through this instrumentality, admitted the light of christianity, and have believed and obeyed the truth. The glorious enterprise is still going forward with increasing encouragement and success.

Contemplate, also, what is doing by *Missionary societies*.— Their great enterprise, is you know, to send out laborers into the wide field of the destitute world ; to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to their dying fellow men ; and, if possible, to persuade all to whom they preach, to embrace, love and obey the gospel. A large number of these laborers, or missionaries of the cross, have gone, and are going out from time to time, into the highways and hedges of our own, and of heathen lands. By the blessing of Heaven, they have been instrumental of the conversion of many sinners, of forming new churches, and of establishing bible classes, sabbath and other schools. They have likewise led multitudes to cast their idols to the moles and to the bats ; and, where satan's seat was, there to erect temples to the worship of the living and true God ; in which, religious homage is now paid to him, who made heaven and earth.

Look, also, to those societies, whose great and laudable object it is, to find out poor and pious young men, worthy of charity, and educate them for the work of the ministry ; so that more laborers, and a sufficient number, if possible, may be raised up qualified, and go forth into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature ; to the important end, that the nations now in darkness, may see a great light, and no longer perish for lack of vision.

Contemplate further, the societies piously engaged in publishing and circulating *religious tracts*. How happy has been the fruit of their labors ! Who can calculate the full amount of good these little messengers, sent forth in all directions, and among almost all nations, have already accomplished ? Have they not been instrumental of

quickenings many of the children of God to greater activity and diligence in his service, as well as of convicting, converting, and saving many souls from death?

We may notice also those associations of men, whose motto is, "Peace on earth and good will toward men." These are *Peace societies*;—peace makers; and on such our Saviour pronounces a blessing. Their noble object is to prove, that all wars are founded in something wrong; that they arise from the lusts, passions, prejudices, ambition, or pride of the wicked hearts of men; endeavoring by addresses, publications, and christian example, to encourage and propagate the benevolent and peaceful principles of the religion of Jesus, the prince of peace; and thus, to put an end, not only to private feuds and contentions, but to those horrid and destructive wars, which are so often waged and cruelly prosecuted among nations.

See, likewise, what is doing in this, and in other countries, to put an end to *Slavery*. Respectable associations have been formed, who have in view the noble enterprise of abolishing all traffick in human flesh, and of restoring to liberty and their just rights and privileges, those, who are now held in cruel bondage. Much has already been accomplished. Great Britain has set the noble example. She has abolished slavery at home, and in all her dominions. And this country is not silent or inactive on this subject. Great and good men are engaged in this christian enterprise. The benevolent work of emancipation is progressing; and the pleasing hope is now cherished, that the time is not far distant, when an utter end will be put to manstealing, slave purchasing, and slave holding, in this, and in every country where the evil exists. Why should any be held in slavery? Why should the colored man be a slave to the white man, any more than the white to the colored? No just reason can be assigned. Surely, then, the whole business of compulsory slavery is to be condemned as iniquitous, and ought to be abandoned speedily and forever.

How much has been achieved, also, during the last half century, in the glorious cause of *Temperance*! Almost innumerable societies have been formed in Europe and America, for the express purpose of showing by reason and argument, by facts and example, that the use of ardent spirits, is not only needless in health, and in all the ordinary business of life, but actually injurious to soul and body, and to the best interests of mankind. We have reason to rejoice, that on this subject, public opinion has so materially changed; that so many of our first characters, members of Congress, and others in the higher stations of life, have countenanced and encouraged the tem-

perance reform ; that a large number have abandoned the manufacture, traffick and use of intoxicating liquors ;—that many drunkards have been reformed, and that the progress of reform is still onward, and has progressed to such a degree, that final victory is now strongly, if not confidently expected. At the same time it is deeply to be lamented, that under the blaze of light, that has for years shone around us, so many should remain *blind*, or will not acknowledge the deleterious effects of ardent spirits. *Blind* did I say? Can they remain blind, or ignorant? Do they not know, have they not heard, that seventy-five physicians, nearly all the physicians of Boston, have publicly declared it as their opinion, that ardent spirits are not only needless in health, but injurious, impairing health, shortening life, and bringing on premature death? Do they not know, that the medical society of our own state, composed of some of our most eminent physicians, have publicly declared the same opinion? and, that a large number of the faculty, in the cities of New-York, Albany, and other places, have also announced the same sentiment? If any are to be found wiser than all these learned and experienced physicians, they must be wise indeed! But, if under such respectable testimony as has been stated, any remain unconvinced, let them go to our infirmaries, to our alms houses, houses of correction, our jails, state prisons, courts of justice, to judges, lawyers, juries and witnesses, and they will have evidence enough.—We are in fact, eye witnesses ourselves, of the direful effects of intemperance. We have seen enough. We have seen too much. We have sickened at the sight; and, alas! are not yet recovered. The eye affects the heart, and the heart is still burdened and distressed. In fine, we need no further evidence to prove beyond all dispute, that intoxicating liquors are the principal cause of the private and domestic broils, of poverty, distress, crimes, condemnation and capital punishments, that occur in our land. Hence, it appears high time for all to awake out of the stupor that has so long been manifested by many, and to join with one accord in adopting and pursuing all proper measures, to put a speedy end to the whole business of distilling, traffick and use of poisonous drinks.

Besides the several Associations already noticed, there are various other societies formed and in operation, whose laudable objects are, to encourage and promote good morals, to suppress gambling, licentiousness, profanity, sabbath-breaking, and other violations of divine and human laws. I have thus particularly mentioned these several societies and their various efforts, not merely as interesting transactions of the last half century, but to lead our minds to consider more fully

the manifest bearing they have towards ameliorating the condition of man, and rendering the state of individuals, families, societies, towns, countries, and even the world, more happy! What a clear bearing have they also, upon the fulfilment of many divine prophecies and promises! In the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testaments, we find predictions of a far more happy state of things here on earth, than has ever yet been enjoyed; when Christ by his word and spirit and the prevalence of his religion, will reign a thousand years; when men shall turn their instruments of war and death into the peaceable implements of husbandry; when they shall no more teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord; for they shall all know him, from the least to the greatest; when the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it; when beasts of the fiercest and mildest nature, as the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the young lion and the calf, shall dwell and feed together, and 'a little child shall lead them; and when there shall be none to hurt or destroy in all the holy mountain.

These and many other desirable and glorious things, are plainly predicted in the sacred volume. There may, it is true, be many difficulties, much opposition, sore trials, sharp conflicts with the powers of darkness, and the machinations of wicked and designing men, before these things come to pass; but they must and will, most assuredly, be accomplished: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. All therefore, who are sincerely engaged on the Lord's side, will finally triumph. Do we not then see, that the benevolent efforts of the day;—that bible, tract, missionary, peace, temperance, and all other benevolent associations in the general measures they are pursuing, and on which heaven has so remarkably smiled, look favorably and directly toward the accomplishment of glorious things? O, happy time! O, glorious day! when an end shall be put to the many distressing evils and calamities now experienced by the human family. Hasten, O Lord, we beseech thee, this glorious period;—this promised, happy day!

Now my respected friends, let us all desire and earnestly pray, that we may speedily be delivered from all those great and painful calamities, which have so long afflicted our race. From war and its horrid effects, from pestilence, earthquakes, tornadoes, inundations, volcanoes, and disasters by sea and land, let us say, Good Lord deliver us. From slavery and oppression, from misrule, civil discord and contention, from profanation of the Sabbath, profane swearing, and all

immoral and licentious practices, Good Lord deliver us. From suicides, duelling, robberies, riots, massacres and murders ; from destruction by fire, by lightning, by drought and famine ; from all excess and intemperance, and their direful and deadly effects, Good Lord, deliver us. And, if it be the divine will, may we all be so happy as to see good days and good years, according to the days and years wherein we have seen evil !

P A R T S E C O N D .

PSALM XXXIX, 5.

"MINE AGE IS AS NOTHING BEFORE THEE."

Having in the first part of this discourse spoken of the brevity of human life, and considered that the age of man, even at its longest date, is as nothing before God, and nothing compared with eternity ; having noticed some of the many interesting scenes and events, that usually fill up the life or age of man ; and having particularly pointed out the great changes that are often experienced by individuals, families, towns, countries, and the world in general, in the course of half a century, all which are closed up at last by the great and solemn change, that takes place in death ; I proceed now, to speak of this town in particular ; and to notice some of those things, which have transpired since my settlement in it.

This town from its first settlement received the name it now bears ; which was given it, as is supposed, by reason of some of its first inhabitants coming from a town of the same name in England. It began to be settled about the year 1635 ; two centuries ago. The first settler, it is said, was by the name of Berry. Others who came soon after, were of the names of Seavey, Rand, and Bracket. Those who soon followed, were of the names of Wallis, Locke and Jenness ; which names, except those of Bracket and of Wallis, are still retained among us ; and most of them are numerous.

This town, which was originally taken off from Portsmouth, Greenland, Hampton and Newcastle, continued about ninety years destitute of the settled ministry of the gospel. The people attended public worship in the neighboring towns as was most convenient. The inhabitants, who at that time were but thinly scattered, and most of them in low circumstances, never began to prosper in any considerable degree as to outward circumstances, until they erected a house of public worship, formed a church, and had the ministry and ordinances of the gospel settled among them. The first meeting house was erected in the year 1725 ; a church was organized July 10, 1726 ; and the first minister settled was Rev. Nathaniel Morrill. He was ordained Sept. 14, 1726 ;—

was a man of acknowledged abilities, of good natural and acquired gifts. He continued in the ministry about seven years, and was then dismissed.

After Mr. Morrill's dismissal, the people remained destitute several years; but being desirous of having the gospel ministry re-settled among them, they made laudable exertions to that end. Having heard several candidates on probation, they made choice of Mr. Samuel Parsons, and invited him to settle with them in the gospel ministry.— Having accepted their invitation, he was ordained Nov. 3, 1736. He officiated in the ministry till the year 1784; making nearly half a century. In the same year, Dec. 29, the present Senior Pastor of this church was ordained as Colleague with this, his worthy and respected Predecessor. The Rev. Mr. Parsons, though infirm by reason of age and repeated paralytic shocks, continued to the fourth of Jan. 1789, in the seventy-eighth year of his age; when, as we trust, he entered into the joy of his Lord. During his ministry two hundred and six persons were admitted into full communion with the Church, and one thousand six hundred, as appears by the church record, received the ordinance of baptism.*

From the close of the year 1784 to the beginning of the present year, making half a century, one hundred and eighty-four have been admitted to the table of the Lord, and nine hundred and four have been baptized. Thirty-six members have been dismissed, and removed from this to other churches, and a few have been received to our communion by letter. The church consists, at present, of one hundred and twenty members.

The number of births, during the last half century, is estimated at about one thousand five hundred and fifty. And the deaths during the same period, not far from seven hundred. The oldest person that has died was a female by the name of Tucker. She lived to the great age of ninety-nine years and nine months.

This town has lost a very considerable number of its inhabitants in times of war, both by sea and land. In the year 1696, twenty-one persons were either killed or carried away captive by the Indians; and a number of others were killed not long after. In the Canada or French War, so called, fourteen were killed or died in the service of their country. And in the Revolutionary War, or first war with Great Britain, the town experienced the loss of twenty-eight persons; most of them young men, and doubtless dear to their friends. In the last war with Great-Britain, about twenty were engaged in the service, in which two lost their lives.

According to accounts collected, twenty-seven persons mostly stran-

*The children of those parents who owned their baptismal covenant, though not admitted to full communion with the church, were then baptized.

gers, have at different times been drowned, on or near the coast within the limits of this town.

We must acknowledge, that notwithstanding the many trials and hardships of our forefathers, and the first settlers of this town, and notwithstanding the vicissitudes, afflictions and mortality, that have been experienced by their descendants from time to time, we at this day reap many of the fruits of their toils and trials. We are, indeed, favored with many blessings and privileges, civil, religious and literary, far beyond what they enjoyed. Laws of gratitude to God should therefore be written on all our hearts, and good fruits in proportion brought forth to the praise and glory of his name.

Our attention may now be turned more particularly to the affairs of this town since my settlement and residence in it. Application having previously been made to me, I came to this town in the year 1784, and preached the first sermon here on the first sabbath in August the same year. After supplying the pulpit a short time, a call to settle in the ministry was given me by the church, and concurred with by the congregation; and by both, the call was unanimous. Little or no opposition was made to the terms of settlement; and the ordination, as before mentioned, took place on the twenty-ninth day of December following. And I now stand before you in the eightieth year of my age, while a very great majority of my first hearers have gone down to the congregation of the dead, and their accounts sealed up to the judgment of the great day. Now when I look around on this assembly, or over the town, I see only here and there one that was then grown to manhood, and but two solitary individuals, that were then members of the church. Of course a new church,—a new congregation, as it were, has come upon the stage.

The population of this town, at the time of my settlement, was about eight hundred and sixty. It is now estimated at twelve hundred. This number by reason of the improvements made, and a better state of husbandry, can be as well or better supported now, than that number could then. On this account, probably, emigrations or removals from this town have been less frequent of late, than in former years. The inhabitants here were formerly, and for a long series of years, remarkable for their unanimity in their civil and religious concerns. For nearly thirty years after my settlement among them, there was not one family of any other than the congregational order or denomination. All who attended public worship, met in this house. These seats, these pews, these galleries were then filled with attentive, and not altogether, as hoped, with unprofitable hearers. Union and peace were then enjoyed. And, as may well be supposed, much less expense was then incurred by the inhabitants than at present, in supporting the public institutions of the gospel. O how good and how pleasant for families,

for parents and children, for brethren and citizens, yea a whole town, to dwell together in unity!

Since that harmonious and pleasant time, owing to some diversity of religious opinions, and other circumstances, two other societies* have been formed in this town, which meet and worship in different places.—Whether these divisions will be for the *better*, that is, for the furtherance of the gospel, for the glory of God and the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, which consists in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, or *not*, we cannot clearly foresee at present, cannot know now; but we shall know hereafter. It will fully appear in the records and by the light of eternity!

While these divisions have been taking place, and different societies forming, there have been, as no doubt many of you recollect, some hard feelings, and sayings, some harsh expressions used towards one another, and in some instances, toward the Pastor of the church; yet I trust, I have never indulged in any feelings of unholy resentment or enmity, toward any individual or family. I know not, that the sun has gone down upon my wrath, or that I have ever felt a spirit of enmity, or wished harm to any of my fellow creatures, friends or foes, saints or sinners.

I speak thus my friends not, I trust, from a spirit of boasting, or esteeming myself better than others. I am sensible I have my sins and infirmities, am subject to like passions with other men. In myself, I see much cause for humiliation, and my sincere desire is, to be suitably humble in view of all my sins and imperfections. Well may I think and speak lowly of myself, as a sinful creature, a worm of the dust; or, as the Psalmist expresses it of himself, "a worm and no man." I view myself but an atom in the vast creation of God; Yea, I am nothing, and my age is as nothing before the great Eternal! before that incomprehensible Being who is from everlasting to everlasting; who is without beginning of days or end of life; and with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day! O, may we all now and ever fear before this great God, realizing that his eye is ever upon us, and that to him we must give an account for every word and action.

But to return from this digression, if it may be so called, I proceed to add a few more observations relative to the divisions and different denominations among us. Although there may have been at times, as before observed, some disagreeable occurrences, some improper feelings and expressions, yet, if any in these matters have acted, as they may have imagined, conscientiously, and with a view to the glory of God and the interests of religion, they will have their reward.

I do, however, myself, after having for more than half a century

*Baptist and Methodist.

studied the sacred scriptures and attended to the writings and sentiments of some of the most eminent, learned and pious men in this, and in other countries, view the congregational order of worship and administration of christian ordinances, more agreeable to the word of God, the only rule of faith and practice, than any with which I am acquainted. God, we know, is a God of order, and not of confusion, as in all the churches.—Hence we are exhorted in scripture to “mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”

Whether the divisions and separations that have taken place in this town, come within the meaning of the inspired passage just quoted, or not, I attempt not at present to decide. To his own master, every one standeth or falleth. Yet, this I say, that notwithstanding some diversity of opinion, different places of worship, and different modes of administering ordinances, we all profess to worship the same living and true God; hold to the same head, acknowledging Jesus Christ to be head over all things to the church, and the great and allsufficient Saviour of sinners. We all preach, in our different way and manner, Christ Jesus the Lord—Christ crucified, the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth. And if Christ be preached, whether it be as the Apostle expresses it, of envy and strife, or of good will, whether it be of contention, not sincerely, or in pretence, or of love, we must and will therein rejoice, even though on some accounts it will be with trembling.

Since my residence in this town, though a good degree of general health has been enjoyed, as much so perhaps on an average, as towns in general, yet sickness has in some seasons prevailed, and consequent mortality been more than usual. The deaths for fifty years past have averaged about fourteen in a year. The smallest number in any one year was *five*; and the largest number, *thirty-five*. One year in particular as may be noticed, was very remarkable for the great sickness and mortality in it; namely, the year 1803. More than two hundred and twenty persons, were seized with diseases of various kinds, so as to require the advice and assistance of a physician. Of these thirty five deceased.—That solemn season, thirty two years ago, not many present, perhaps, can distinctly remember. But the mention of the sickness and mortality may lead us to consider to what we are every year liable; and to realize, that it is owing to the long suffering and mercy of our God, that under our manifold sins and neglects of duty, we are not visited with more frequent and distressing judgments than we are. O, that his long-suffering and goodness might lead us to repentance, and to newness of life! When we humbly confess and forsake our sins, and faithfully discharge duties, serving the Lord our God in sincerity and truth, then may

we expect to spend our days in prosperity, and our years in sacred peace and pleasure ; and shall be that happy people whose God is the Lord.—O, may the year upon which we have now entered, be a year of the right hand of the Most High ! wherein we shall, as individuals and as a people, experience the blessings of the upper and nether springs ; wherein God shall pour out of his spirit upon us, and his blessing upon our offspring ; wherein his work shall be revived, and his goings and glory be seen more abundantly, than in years that are past.

Realizing, that it is through the merciful kindness of our Father in heaven, that we have been brought to the commencement of a new year, let us look back upon the one that is past ; in which we have experienced many outward enjoyments, have had our civil and religious privileges continued, and most of us, perhaps, our beloved friends and relatives spared to us. For which favors, unfeigned thanks should be rendered to the great Preserver of men, and the giver of every good gift. Some among us, however, have been called to experience sore bereavements, and to mourn the loss of near and beloved friends. We can recognise and record thirteen deaths the last year. Those, who have been called to mourning, will doubtless readily recollect their afflictions and trials, and will still feel the obligations they are under to make a wise improvement of them, and seriously to regard the voice which says, “Be you also ready.”—In all probability others among us, in the course of the present year, will receive the summons of death. And as we know not the day or year of our decease, each one of us may say, with particular application to himself, It may be me ! It may be me !—Am I ready ?

In further noticing the affairs of this town, it may not be improper to mention, that in the year 1828, the civil contract between the Senior Pastor of this church and people was dissolved ; but his pastoral relation to the church still continues.

The present Junior Pastor of the church, after supplying the pulpit a few months, was invited to settle here in the sacred ministry. Having accepted the invitation, he was ordained as colleague Pastor of the church, the thirteenth day of May, 1829. On him the ministerial labors and duties, of course, have devolved. He has not, we trust, laboured in vain among us. If he may not have seen that abundant success attending his ministrations, in the awakening, conviction and conversion of sinners, and in quickening the children of God to greater activity and engagedness in the cause of the Redeemer, for which it appears to have been his hearts desire and prayer to God, yet, a number of you, I trust can acknowledge him as having been instrumental of promoting your spiritual interests and welfare.

Although the senior Pastor has occasionally assisted in religious exercises and duties, yet, considering his advanced age, official labor by

him in future, is altogether uncertain. I would not say, my friends, that this is the last time, I shall attempt publicly to address you ; but, to the eye of reason, and according to the usual course of Providence, it cannot be very long before it may be said by those who survive. We, shall hear his voice, we shall see his face no more ! Your daily and earnest prayers to God for me, are requested ; that, whether I live, I may live unto the Lord, or whether I die, I may die unto the Lord ; that whether, therefore, I live or die, I may be the Lord's,

What may be further offered on this occasion, will be by way of advice and exhortation. I shall direct myself to several ages and classes of persons.

First, to children.

I write unto you, little children, lambs of the flock ; “ your parents' hope, your parents' joy.” I write unto you, because you are capable of receiving instruction and need advice ; because you are capable of knowing the Father, your Creator, who has given you reason, conscience and immortal souls, and made you capable of loving, serving, glorifying, and enjoying him forever ; because you are favored with the means of knowing Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, who came to seek and to save them that were lost ; who, while here upon earth, took little children up in his arms, laid his hands upon them, and blessed them ; and when some were so unreasonable as to oppose it, he was displeased, and said, “ Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not ; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” And now, little children, as you need a Saviour, and need his forgiveness and blessing, ought I not to tell you your duty, and exhort you to consider your necessities, and immediately come to this compassionate Saviour, who loved you and died to save you ; also, to repent of your sins, to seek his favour and forgiveness, to give up your hearts to him, and while you live, to love, serve, and obey him. All these things are very plain and reasonable ; you are capable of understanding them ; and now, while young, you have a favorable opportunity, and ought seriously to attend to them. It is your duty also, to honour and obey your parents, to love your brothers and sisters, to be kind and affectionate to your school mates, to love and speak the truth, to read and esteem the Bible, and to fear God and keep all his commandments. The means of improvement, with which you are favored ; are greater than what children formerly enjoyed ; much greater than what your parents had when they were young. Being, thus highly favored above what hundreds of thousands, in our own, and especially in heathen countries, have been, should I not then tell you, highly to prize, and diligently improve these means, these precious privileges ? particularly to attend the sabbath school, to study the sacred scriptures, that you may learn the way of life and salvation by Jesus Christ.

Does it not seem strange to you who come to this school, that more do not attend it ?—a school in which the most interesting things are taught, things concerning God, Christ, and Heaven, that holy, happy place. It is observed, that many do not attend the sabbath school. I know not what reason they assign for it. Can you tell me, children, why it is, that so many stay away ? It is a free school, and whosoever will, may come and enjoy its privileges. Those who do attend, attract the notice and esteem of their instructors and friends, and will probably

soon surpass others in knowledge and respectability. O, how pleasant it is to see a large number of children and youth assembled together in the holy sanctuary, to be instructed in divine and heavenly things, and have pointed out to them the only way that leads to glory, honour and immortality! And that being led to walk in wisdom's ways, we may have satisfactory evidence, that they are numbered among those happy children, of whom it is said, Of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Secondly, to young men.

I write unto you, my young friends, because you are strong; have arrived to strength of body and of mind, and are able to discern between good and evil; and because you are able by divine help, and by making use of the christian armour, to resist the wiles of the adversary, to overcome the wicked one, and to withstand the various temptations, with which you may be assaulted. The stage of life to which you have now arrived, is very interesting and critical. Much is depending upon the course you take, and the qualifications you acquire. The eyes of your parents and friends, and of the more aged members of society, are now directed to you as their successors,—as those who are soon to take the lead in the business and concerns of life. Your fathers and elders were once young as you are now. They did not then, perhaps, realize the vast importance of their time and privileges; and like many who are young, did not fully appreciate the advantages of a good education, which is so necessary to being qualified for eminent usefulness in their day and generation. Your time now is equally precious and important as theirs was then. Your privileges are, indeed, much greater than what they enjoyed. Schools at the present day are better furnished and instructed; are more convenient and kept longer; books are more easily procured, and better adapted to the great purposes of education. And further; the means of grace and religious knowledge are enjoyed to a greater degree than formerly; so that you enjoy greater facilities of acquiring knowledge, both human and divine, than were experienced by your fathers. Should I not then exhort and urge you, to avail yourselves of all the opportunities you have, to improve your strength and capacities, your time and talents, and the day and means of grace, for acquiring that knowledge and those qualifications, which are requisite to acting your several parts in life, with credit to yourselves, with honor to God, and usefulness to your fellow men? May I not also reason with you, and endeavour to excite you to improve the many leisure hours you have, your long winter evenings, and your intervals of labor in all seasons of the year, for this important purpose. Are there not many precious hours lost in doing little or nothing of importance; spent in idle company, trifling conversation, and in unnecessary, and perhaps, hurtful pastimes and recreations; or spent in reading books of no value, calculated rather to dissipate the mind and thoughts, than to instruct, edify, or reform? Realize then, my friends, that these hours, wisely improved in reading and studies, would serve to furnish you for the enjoyment of better company; to render you more agreeable to your companions, and more respectable members of society.

Furthermore, when we consider the many enemies and temptations with which you are surrounded, enemies of your holiness and virtue, and the great danger you are in of being led astray from the paths of rectitude, and of falling into sin, should I not caution, counsel and warn you? Have not many young persons, both male and female, been overcome by allurements and temptations? overcome by the wiles of the enemy, by

deceitful and flattering appearances and promises? Have not many been ensnared by the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life? bringing reproach not only upon themselves, and upon their families and connexions, but upon the town and societies to which they belong, and upon our holy religion?—Say then, my young friends, Is it not needful and proper; Is it not a friendly part in him, whose duty it is to declare the whole counsel of God, to address you in particular, and earnestly to beseech you, to guard against the enemies of your holiness and virtue, your peace and happiness? affectionately urging you to watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation, that you may be strengthened with all might in the inner and outward man, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, maintaining your integrity and honour. For you should realize, that you are able by divine grace to stand, and to walk uprightly; yea, you can do all things necessary for your present safety, and for your final victory and salvation, through Christ strengthening you; through him, who, while here upon earth, was a pattern of every virtue, and having himself suffered being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted.

Thirdly, to fathers.

I write unto you, fathers, heads of families, and the leading and most influential portion of the community; and, in a friendly manner would call you to consider the highly responsible stations and relations in which you stand; to realize how much is depending on the parts you act, on a faithful discharge of the duties you owe to the young and rising generation and to society; and on the example you set before your families and those around you. In view of the importance of these things, does it not appear necessary and expedient, that you should be put in remembrance of them, though ye know them; and that you may be more and more established in the knowledge and practice of duty? I would, therefore, fathers and mothers, speak unto you the things which become sound doctrine, and exhort you, in the words of Paul the aged, to be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, charity, patience, showing all good fidelity, maintaining good works; not at any time provoking your children to wrath, but bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; also, to correct them seasonably and in measure, knowing, that as foolishness is bound up in the hearts of children, the rod of correction will drive it far from them; and to be in behaviour before your families at all times as becometh holiness, not neglecting the morning and evening sacrifice, nor any known duty; to be teachers of good things; teaching your children and households, and even commanding them, as did Abraham the father of the faithful, to do justice and judgment, and to keep the right ways of the Lord; also, to teach the young men and women to be sober minded, to be discreet, chaste, good and obedient to the faith, that the word of God be not blasphemed. When your children and young people around you, refuse to receive instruction, set at nought the counsels of wisdom, and would none of her reproofs, then is the word of God despised, reproached and blasphemed. But when, in accordance with your good instruction and pious example, they walk uprightly and keep the commandments of God, then is his word honored, and you will have occasion of great joy; for no greater joy have godly parents than to see and hear that their children walk in the truth. Children, you know, especially when young, are very apt to be influenced by what they notice in their parents. If then your life and conversation, if your instruction and example be good, is it not to be hoped, that your children will be

followers of that which is good? But if bad, will they not in all probability, by your conversation and example, be corrupted and ruined?—Alas! how many children have in this way, been destroyed! O, ye, who are fathers and mothers, realize the high responsibility that rests upon you, and the very important bearing your manner of life has, and will be likely to have, upon the character of your children; and indeed upon all the young and rising generation around you!

In the next place, I would address myself to the members of the church; and I shall endeavor to speak unto you, my beloved brethren and friends, as becometh the oracles of God. I have in times past written unto your fathers. I have also before written to you. Permit me now to add a few words for your consideration and quickening. Realize that the church is as a light set on a hill which cannot be hid. The eyes of God are upon it for good, though he often find some things in it, as he did in the seven churches of Asia, amiss; and therefore deserving rebuke and chastening; and were exhorted to be watchful and to repent. But the eyes of the world are upon the church for evil. Many, it is believed, are watching for the halting of its members; and the disposition of some of its enemies is such, that they rejoice, as we have reason to think, when any are left to stumble and fall; even when the blessed Redeemer is wounded in the house of his friends!

Is it not needful then, that you be circumspect and vigilant; that you walk in wisdom toward them that are without, giving no occasion of offence to any; and if possible, no ground for the enemies of religion to speak reproachfully of you, or of the religion you profess. And since you are in a world surrounded by so many enemies, temptations and dangers, how needful is it, also, that you put on the whole armour of God, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the sword of the spirit; having your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; praying also with all prayer and supplication in the spirit; and watching thereunto with all perseverance, that you may thus be strong in the Lord, and able to withstand in the evil day; and having done all to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free.

Being the professed disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, be careful, dearly beloved, to exercise and exemplify the virtues and graces of christianity. Feel and manifest at all times those bowels of mercy, and that spirit of kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, forbearance, long suffering and forgiveness, toward one another, which the word of God so expressly enjoins. Above all things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. And, as much is said in the inspired volume, respecting peace, unity and love, among the followers of Christ, be exhorted to love as brethren; to be of one accord and of one mind; to avoid all strife and vain glory; and in lowliness of mind, to esteem others better than yourselves. Let the same mind be in you, at all times, which was also in Christ Jesus, and walk in his steps; thus manifesting yourselves to be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a world lying in wickedness.

Finally, brethren, rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks. Prove all things, hold fast that which is good, and abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

If there be any present, who have not publicly professed faith in Christ, but think seriously on this subject; who feel it to be their duty, and yet live in its neglect, be assured, my friends, that this neglect or delay is hazardous with regard to your spiritual and eternal interests; and it immediately concerns you to be really and professedly the friends of Christ, as you would expect to be owned and accepted of him, when he shall come in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels, to judge the world in righteousness. Surely he that shall come, will come, and may come suddenly. Alas! if you should then be found in a state of disobedience!

If there be any careless and unconcerned, impenitent and unbelieving, regardless of the terrible thunders of Sinai and curses of the law, regardless also of the pleasant inviting sound of the gospel; let me say to you in a warning voice, "A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep," and there is reason to fear, that you will sleep the sleep of death, and go down to destruction! But loth my friends to give you up, loth that you should give yourselves up to ruin, I would now hold up before you the golden sceptre of mercy, that is still in great compassion extended toward you, beseeching you to touch it and live.

To this whole assembly, to all classes, aged and young, parents and children, I would in conclusion say, Realize, my respected friends, your high standing in the scale of beings, placed here on the earth, the most distinguished part of the visible creation, being made rational, accountable, moral agents, but little lower than the angels, and put on probation for another and never ending state of existence. Surely a high and most interesting destiny awaits you hereafter; for all must enter the eternal world, must come to judgment, and be judged and rewarded according to their character and works. Under the light and privileges of the gospel, and that divine assistance which is freely offered, you may become wise unto salvation and rise to heaven; or you may, by being regardless of the warnings and invitations given you in the gospel, and going on presumptuously in the ways of sin, go down to the regions of darkness, horror and despair. So that life and death, the blessing and the curse, heaven and hell, are now set before you, to allure on the one hand, and to alarm on the other, that you may be induced to act the wiser part. Is not your state, therefore, exceedingly critical and interesting? And is it not very necessary and proper, that those whose duty it is to watch for souls, as those that must give an account, to instruct, counsel, exhort and warn you?

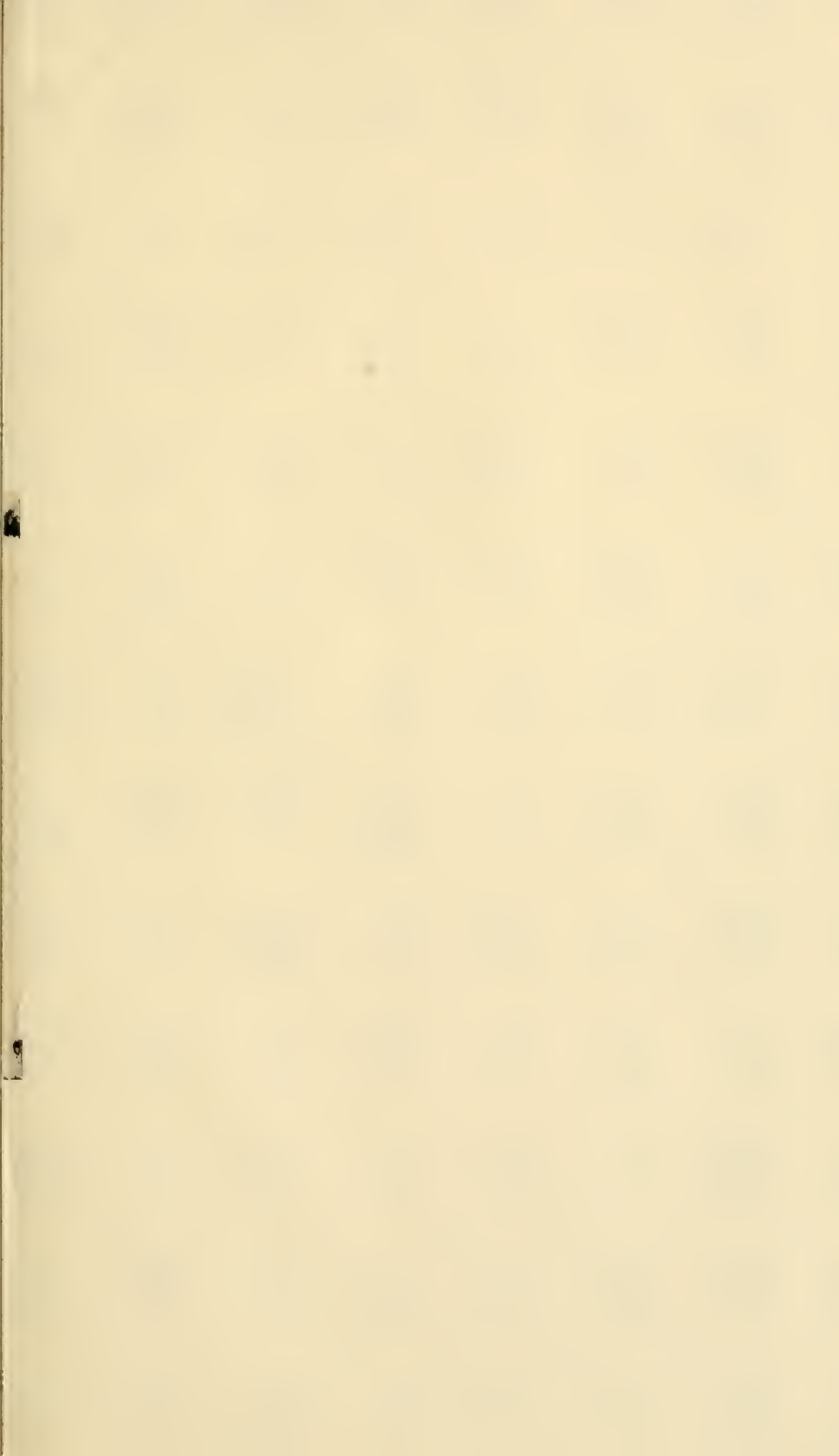
Be entreated, my friends, to consider what has been done, and is still doing for you, as sinners! Abundant provision has been made in Christ for your recovery from a state of sin and condemnation. God is now graciously giving you a space for repentance, and solemnly commands you to repent. He is indulging you with the day and means of grace, and enjoins it upon you to improve them. He is trying you by mercies and afflictions; and makes it your plain duty in the day of prosperity to be joyful and thankful, and in the day of adversity to

consider his hand, and learn righteousness. He has given his only sons to be the great prophet, priest and king, of salvation. And speaks, as with a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him." He has appointed the holy sabbath, as a day of sacred rest, and serious attention to religious concerns and duties ;—and in a thundering voice from the fiery mount, commands you to remember the sabbath day to keep it holy: He has instituted the duties of public worship, and christian ordinances, for your improvement, and expressly enjoins it upon you, not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is. He has also instituted the sacred ministry, and set watchmen upon the walls of Zion, whose duty it is to cry aloud and spare not ; to lift their voices like a trumpet and show the people their sins and transgressions ; and to say unto them, as I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live ; therefore, turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die. Your Maker and judge has given you the moral law, as a rule of life, and the glorious gospel as a rule of faith and practice ;—and affectionately enjoins it upon you, to hear, believe and obey, that your souls may live.

I would now urge you all, my friends, to realize that the great end of the plan of redemption, of the mission of the Son of God to this our earth, of the scriptures of the old and new testament, of all the means and institutions of religion, and of the various condescending and gracious measures that have been, and still are taken with the children of men, is, that sinners of mankind might be led to repentance, faith and obedience. Holy obedience is, indeed, that which crowns the whole. For, if you attend to all the means and institutions of religion, and wait upon God in all the ways of his appointment, yet, if the end should not be found in holy obedience, what would it profit ? If you were to have the whole counsel of God declared to you, if the truths of the divine word were preached to you every sabbath, and every day of the week, and preached by the most eminent and engaged speakers ; and if they were to make use of the most powerful arguments to prevail with you to love and obey the truth, still, if the fruit should not be found in holy obedience, what would it profit ? Nay, if one should arise from the dark regions of the dead, or come up from the bottomless pit, or should a messenger descend from the skies, an angel come down from heaven, and preach as did Moses and the Prophets, as did Christ and his apostles, and the result should not be found in holy obedience to the divine will, what would it profit ?

Hence you may justly infer, that if you would be savingly profited by the preaching of the word, by the means and institutions of religion, and by the various methods God is taking with you in the course of his providence and grace, bow in obedience to his holy will. If you would be blessed in all your concerns, temporal and spiritual, if you would be blessed in your stations and employments, in the labor of your hands, in your going out and coming in ; if you would be blessed in your persons and families, and in society ; if you would be blessed in life and at death, and happy in the world of spirits ; Be you doers of the word, obedient to the truth, and not the hearers only.

Hear, in conclusion, what the Apostle James saith, "*Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deeds.*" And may I not add, *Blessed forevermore!*







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